

“State of play”

Fourth Week of the General Chapter Rome, 17 - 22 March 2014

We have come to the end of the fourth week of our General Chapter. Just a month ago on 22 February, we began this spiritual adventure in “Don Bosco’s places”. We can say that we have already gone half the distance and can look back with satisfaction on the road thus travelled.

1. And in the week that is just concluding, from 17 to 22 March, the Commissions have carried out the following work:

- The juridical commission has completed the most urgent set of tasks assigned to it, regarding the structures of central government of the Congregation, with just one change to the Constitutions, the one concerning the Vicar and the Salesian Family; setting up two Regions in Europe and the Middle East; introducing a new way of electing General Councillors responsible for sectors.
- The commissions studying the theme have provided observations on the first draft of the first two core topics for their various elements and have begun studying the third.
- The drafting commission has presented the first draft of all three core topics and the first of these has already been the topic of a first discussion in the Assembly.

2. The third and updated edition of the Youth Ministry Frame of Reference has been presented to the Assembly, followed by questions.

3. Although next week will be entirely dedicated to discernment and elections of the Rector Major and members of his council, it is clear that the Chapter is entering a new phase, ever more focused on the theme of GC27 “Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel”. This is why we need the Commissions studying the theme and discussion on it in the Assembly to carry out a focused and concrete effort. We need to see that reflection on the life of the Congregation in the light of this theme becomes a spirit and is translated into a document with some major directions for the years to come.

4. GC27 must be a Chapter marking a turning point that has us entering decisively into a new vision of the world in this new springtime for the Church, in this moment of grace for Consecrated Life and the Congregation in particular. This is why I want to renew the invitation to make radical choices at three levels: personal, institutional (community, province, congregation), structural. They are necessary choices that will lead us back to Christ and his Gospel, see us fitting in more with the Church and having greater love for the poor, following in Don Bosco’s footsteps. This is the significance of C. 146 when it speaks of the General Chapter: “It is the fraternal meeting in which the Salesians carry out a communal reflection to keep themselves faithful to the Gospel and to their Founder’s charism, and sensitive to the needs of time and place. Through the General Chapter the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to discern God’s will at a specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service.”

I wish everyone a peaceful weekend which will prepare us to enter into a week of discernment and elections with a heart open to the Spirit.

Rome, 22 March 2014

Fr Pascual Chávez V., sdb

The Rector Major
THE STATE OF PLAY
Monday, 17 March 2014

We began this spiritual experience of ours with *a few introductory days* (pilgrimage to the places associated with Don Bosco, the presentation of the reports of the Councillors for the Departments and the Regions and the Retreat) which were very important in bringing the members of the Chapter together, creating an environment of listening, reflection, prayer and work.

The GC 27 officially began with the solemn opening ceremony, the presentation by the Rector Major of his Report with an overall view of the state of the Congregation and of the future prospects.

The *first working week* of the Chapter members, in addition to providing an opportunity to get to know each other better and become familiar with the technology in use, was spent studying the Report and trying to clearly identify the great challenges and opportunities facing the Congregation now and in the immediate future, organising the commissions and carrying out the first elections and appointments (chairmen, secretaries) for the smooth running of the GC.

The *second working week of the Chapter members* was very fruitful, demonstrating both the good organisation in place and the way everyone was successfully cooperating. In fact the central commission began coordinating the work, the juridical commission presented its first proposals on the structures of animation and central government of the Congregation, the 4 commission on the theme of "Witnesses of the radical approach of the Gospel" undertook the first work on the three key issues and the drafting commission has already presented the first two of these.

All of this bodes well for this *third working week* so that we may quickly manage to have the approval of the more urgent proposals of the juridical commission (those needing the approval of the Holy See) and already have a first draft of the Chapter document before the start of the week of discernment for the elections. Obviously we are dependent upon the time needed for the study in the commissions and in the assembly of the proposals of the juridical commission.

It is important to continue to maintain this atmosphere of calm, sharing, work and prayer so as to do these things well and then come to the elections.

Nevertheless, I feel I need to invite you to be *more decisive and courageous with regard to the main way ahead for the future of the Congregation, especially in identifying the “path” to be followed*, so that it really places us in harmony with the model of the Church looking outwards with a missionary spirit that Pope Francis is dreaming about. It will be possible to realise this dream if there are new agents of pastoral ministry who are renewed in depth, true missionary disciples of the Risen Lord, at the service of the Kingdom for the transformation of the world. Personal conversion alone, without pastoral and structural conversion is not sufficient. While without personal conversion, pastoral and structural conversion is impossible.

Therefore it is a question of a renewed option for Jesus, for the Jesus of the Gospels, the God made Man, an option that is based on truth, on humanity and on service, free from any compromise, that helps us to discover God (*quaerere Deum*) through an intense experience of God in Him , and to discover man (*quaerere hominem*) through love and mercy towards the confreres and the young. It is this that can give a fresh sparkle to our Salesian life and make it once again credible, inviting, attractive, but above all it will help so that the young make the discovery of who the real Jesus is, and can then respond to his question: “Who do you say that I am?” with the reply: “Truely this Man is the Son the God, the Saviour,”

Therefore from a practica point of view, without fear we have *to get to the roots, to the causes of the poverty and the exclusion* in which millions and millions of people are living. Nor should we forget that the current cultural climate tends to propose life styles and ways of living contrary to the nature and to the dignity of the human person, placing above the value of the individual, power, wealth and pleasure. Our educative pastoral work ought to help in transforming this society. Social exclusion means that people cannot belong to the society in which they are living; not that they are at the bottom, nor on the fringes, nor that they are powerless, but simply that they are outside, put to one side. Excluded people are not only exploited, they are considered disposable, social rejects. This is why we must be engaged in an educational and pastoral work that restores dignity to people, especially the young. It is precisely because this implies a sensitive approach to poverty, love for the poor and a poor life that we need to be ‘witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel’.

Rome, 17 March '14

Fr Pascual Chávez V., sdb